United Nations A/C.2/53/SR.22

General Assembly
Fifty-third session

Official Records

Distr.: General
10 November 1998

Original: English

Second Committee

Summary record of the 22nd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 22 October 1998, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Asadi ..... (Islamic Republic of Iran)
later: Mr. Prendergast (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Jamaica)

Contents

Agenda item 94: Environment and sustainable development

(b) Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind

(c) Implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

(d) Convention on Biological Diversity

(e) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

98-81826 (E)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 94: Environment and sustainable development (A/53/25, A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/95-S/1998/311, A/53/96, A/53/156-S/1998/78, A/53/165-S/1998/601, A/53/371-S/1998/848, A/53/416, A/53/425, A/53/487)

(b) Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind (A/53/449)

(c) Implementation of the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (A/53/65-E/1998/5, A/53/358)

(d) Convention on Biological Diversity (A/53/451)

(e) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (A/53/516)

1. **Mr. Zammit-Cutajar** (Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), introducing the note by the Secretary-General (A/53/449), said that the most significant outcome of the third session of the Conference of the Parties had been the Kyoto Protocol, which was as much an economic instrument as an environmental one. The fact that the next session would be held in a developing country, Argentina, underlined the global nature of the climate change problem. The outcomes of that session would be more in the form of action plans, and firm deadlines for action on the part of the Parties. The agenda reflected the concern of Governments to achieve a balance between Convention issues and Protocol issues. One point on which there was a very clear difference of views, was the question of whether and how to debate the future development of commitments under the Convention.

2. The review of the administrative arrangements that linked the Framework Convention on Climate Change and its secretariat to the United Nations proper would be conducted by the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session and by the Conference of the Parties. However, it had been agreed that administrative responsibilities should be shifted increasingly from Geneva to Bonn.

3. **Mr. Johnston** (Convention on Biological Diversity), introducing the note by the Secretary-General contained in document A/53/451, said that in his view, the Convention's effectiveness basically depended on its being able to generate sound scientific information for use by planners and decision makers. Developing scientific understanding of biodiversity and the human relationship with biodiversity was necessary to preventing the adverse impact that human activities had on biodiversity. The Convention's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) had developed into a leading source of scientific advice on biodiversity. The secretariat had received over 100 national biodiversity reports, which represented the most significant source of information on biodiversity at the international level. The Convention therefore had a significant contribution to make to the deliberations within the United Nations on those matters.

4. **Mr. Diallo** (Executive Secretary, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, (A/53/516), said that to date 143 countries from all regions of the world as well as regional economic integration organizations, including the European Union, had ratified or acceded to the Convention. The organization in Recife, Brazil, of the first forum between Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean on the implementation of the Convention, with the financial support of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Governments of France, Germany and Spain, demonstrated that the Convention was increasingly at the heart of the environmental concerns of the various States Parties.

5. One of the main issues on the agenda of the second session of the Conference of the Parties was the operationalization of the Global Mechanism. The Conference would be invited to endorse the text of the Memorandum of Agreement with IFAD on the modalities and administrative operations for the Global Mechanism. He thanked all the countries and international organizations that had responded to the Secretary-General's appeal for voluntary contributions to the trust funds established for the participation of developing countries in the meetings of the Conference of the Parties and in support of the Secretariat's activities, and paid special tribute to the Government of Japan for its contribution of $1,800,000 for 1998.

6. **Mr. Dengo** (Department of Economic and Social Affairs), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on plans and projects for the sustainable development of the small island developing States implemented, under implementation or envisaged for the period of 1999–2003 by bilateral donors, United Nations organizations and regional and non-United Nations international organizations (A/53/358), said that, the information it provided was helpful in assessing the responsiveness of the international

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

community to the Programme of Action for such countries and seemed to suggest an increase in projects since 1994. However, since only sketchy information had been made available by respondents regarding projects to be implemented in the coming five years, it was premature to judge whether that increase would be sustained. Those donor agencies that had not provided inputs, or that wished to update their inputs, should do so prior to the donors' conference.

7. **Mr. Wibisono** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, welcomed the signing of the Kyoto Protocol by over 50 States. While the Kyoto session was widely seen as a significant first step towards limiting the unbridled growth in greenhouse gas emissions, there were numerous scientific, technical and economic uncertainties about the new mechanisms and their implications. One basic concern was that they moved essential domestic action off shore. It was therefore important not only to develop agreed international standards for monitoring and verification but, above all, to determine a non-compliance regime pursuant to article 18 of the Protocol.

8. In the view of the Group of 77 and China, the activities to be undertaken by Annex 1 Parties under the new mechanisms should be supplementary to domestic actions. Early and committed action by the developed countries was critical and fundamental, since they were the countries historically responsible for the problem and currently had the capacities to produce effective results. It was unfair and unacceptable that the developing countries, which were struggling to attain decent standards of living, should be asked to curtail their industrial activity and share in the efforts to reduce emissions so that the industrialized countries could continue with their unsustainable production and consumption patterns. In accordance with the principles of common but differentiated responsibilities, developed countries must take the lead and not merely reduce emissions, but also modify their production and consumption patterns.

9. The Group of 77 and China reiterated the importance of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and appealed to the international community to participate actively in the activities planned for 1999, including the donor conference and the special session of the General Assembly on small island developing States. Concerning the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/53/358, the Group welcomed the positive developments in some of the priority areas of concern, in particular the action by the United Nations in support of the system-wide implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and endorsed the conclusions contained in paragraphs 23 to 26. Small island States had been and were making considerable and strenuous efforts at the national and regional levels. Unfortunately, those endeavours were not being adequately complemented by the international community in line with commitments undertaken under the global conference to operationalize and implement the Programme of Action. The bilateral and multilateral donor community must provide adequate financial resources and technical assistance to enable the small island developing States to address their special socio-economic development constraints more effectively.

10. Turning to the Convention on Biological Diversity, he said that it was gratifying to note that the Parties had been carrying out their work programme on agricultural biodiversity in close cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Convention was an important instrument for translating international commitments into national action, but for that to happen resources had to be increased so that the needs of the developing countries could be addressed more adequately. The Group of 77 and China therefore urged donors to make adequate financial resources available through the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and through other sources, including bilateral sources.

11. The countries affected by serious drought and desertification were giving priority to restoring and protecting their national and global environments, but the eradication of poverty was still the key strategy for combating desertification and achieving sustainable development. The Group of 77 and China hoped that the Global Mechanism would successfully mobilize resources and channel them to the developing countries, particularly to those in Africa. It appealed to all countries to agree to the establishment of a committee on the review of the implementation of the Convention, and reiterated the appeal made by the Conference of Parties to the developed countries, the multilateral and bilateral financial institutions and the private sector to make voluntary contributions to the Global Mechanism.

12. With only a few days before the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the second session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Group of 77 and China considered that the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities clearly agreed upon at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and in Agenda 21 should be fully applied, and the sessions should not be distracted by issues extraneous to the letter and spirit of the two Conventions.

13. **Mr. Biaou** (Benin), speaking as Chairman of the African Group on the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, said that there was only one African State which had yet to ratify the Convention, and all were drawing up national programmes of action. They were confident that once they had adopted national, subregional and regional programmes of action, partnership agreements would be concluded with the developed countries, the financial institutions and the private sector. At the same time as drawing up their national programmes of action, they were taking steps to establish national funds for combating desertification.

14. In each of the five subregions steps were being taken to establish a facilitation fund to finance the elaboration and implementation of the respective subregional programme of action.

15. At the regional level, the process of elaborating a regional programme of action for Africa had been initiated in 1998 with the holding of regional workshops to build its basic structure of seven networks. A regional coordination unit would be operational by 1 January 1999 at the latest, and in parallel with it would be a regional facilitation fund.

16. At the interregional level, there was now a forum on implementation of the Convention linking the countries of Africa with those of Latin America and the Caribbean, which had produced a six-point platform for cooperation.

17. At the international level, since African countries were fulfilling their obligations and undertakings, they also expected their bilateral and multilateral partners to do the same by strengthening their financial support. He noted that in June 1998, the Organization of African Unity had offered US$ 300,000 to finance implementation of the Convention at the regional level. It was hoped that that would encourage development partners to continue with their support in terms of financial contributions.

18. **Mr. Cordeiro** (Brazil) said that, based on the misleading argument that the effectiveness of international efforts to address the issue of climate change would depend on the "meaningful participation and engagement by key developing countries", attempts were once again being made to revive the proposal to establish "voluntary commitments" to reduce emissions by developing countries. The most conspicuous of the many false assumptions lying behind that proposal was that developed countries were taking the lead in fulfilling the objectives of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the implication that developing countries were not contributing their share. Nothing could be further from the truth.

19. As a result of a series of fiscal, industrial and technological policies, along with specific programmes for energy efficiency and conservation, Brazil had not only significantly reduced its rate of deforestation but had also reduced its levels of carbon dioxide emissions, which on a per capita basis were no more than 0.3 tons of carbon per year. That compared with 5 tons in the United States of America, 4.3 tons in the Russian Federation, 3 tons in Japan and 2.5 tons in Europe. In terms of Gross Domestic Product, Brazil's carbon dioxide emissions did not exceed 0.05 tons of carbon per US dollar of output, which was one fifth of the United States figure and one third of that for Europe and Japan.

20. With the approach of the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties it was hoped that a clear indication would emerge as to whether annex I countries would live up to their commitments and effectively take the lead in international efforts to address climate change or whether they would continue to lag behind in those efforts. The clean development mechanism should be given precedence over emission trading and joint implementation among annex I countries. It would allow non-annex I countries to benefit from project activities and at the same time introduce an element of flexibility that would help annex I countries to achieve their reduction targets. It also had the potential to enhance the contribution by non-annex I countries in reducing global warming in a manner consistent with the Convention and also advantageous to all parties. Its success would very much depend on the prior establishment by the annex I countries of strict national regulations limiting their emissions, and on the establishment of a strict set of rules penalizing non-compliance with the emission targets agreed at Kyoto. Credits under the clean development mechanism should accrue only to annex I countries that were capable of demonstrating significant reductions in domestic emissions. Emission reduction targets for annex I countries should be based not on purely political compromise but on objective technical and scientific criteria relating historical emissions to their measured effect in terms of global warming.

21. Brazil attached the highest importance to implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification. Recent studies had shown that land degradation affected approximately 11 per cent of its national territory, and mostly in an area which was home to the largest and poorest rural population. Desertification in Brazil caused estimated economic losses of US$ 300 million per year, and it had been established that the cost of reclaiming the affected regions would be close to US$ 3.8 billion. The Brazilian Government was firmly committed to

implementation of its national plan to combat desertification and drought and of the Latin American and Caribbean annex to the Convention. Brazil had offered to host the third session of the Conference of the Parties in August 1999.

22. **Mr. Isakov** (Russian Federation) said that his country was interested in a constructive solution of the problem of global climate change, and was committed to the course set by the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session. The Russian Federation continued to meet in full its obligations under the Framework Convention on Climate Change, and had considerably reduced its level of emission of greenhouse gases as compared with 1990. His Government was working on issues related to ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, and believed that an efficient and fair international system of greenhouse gas emission quotas trading should not impede the sustainable economic development of States parties but should be based on voluntary principles. It should stipulate the parties' right to choose between accumulating unused emission quotas to be realized in the future and using them for trading and attracting foreign investments.

23. Turning to the Convention on Biological Diversity, he welcomed the fact that attention was being paid to the important issue of access to genetic resources and the biological diversity of inland water ecosystems. It was to be hoped that the draft protocol on biological safety would be adopted. The Russian Federation had stepped up its efforts to preserve biological diversity, improving its legal framework and expanding its system of protected areas and conservation of endangered species. However, there remained a fairly large number of problems, chiefly related to the unfavourable financial and economic situation in his country.

24. His delegation reaffirmed its principled interest in accession to the Convention to Combat Desertification and expected that the interests of Central and Eastern Europe would be taken into account and reflected in the additional annex to the Convention. It was ready to cooperate with all the Parties to the Convention in that regard, and was also ready for constructive cooperation within the framework of the Convention.

25. Turning finally to the problem of sustainable development of small island developing States, he pointed to the need to complete work on the vulnerability index for them and to ensure that it was duly taken into account when drawing up the policy of their sustainable development.

26. **Mr. Kolby** (Norway) said it was necessary to ensure policy coherence and synergy among the various legally binding conventions and protocols concerning the environment in order to advance their effective implementation. Although the Conferences of the Parties were autonomous bodies, they should be encouraged to take advantage of the benefits that could result from better coordination. Norway supported UNEP's central role in following up the relevant recommendations, and considered that the General Assembly could play a useful role which should be further elaborated.

27. He said that the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change should result in tangible progress in clarifying principles, rules and guidelines to facilitate the ratification process, including the necessary work on operational elements of the flexibility mechanisms in a way which ensured cost-effective limitation of gas emissions in accordance with the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol. In that regard, it was important that the session finalize as much as possible of the remaining work and establish a clear timetable for tasks which required more time.

28. Turning to the Convention to Combat Desertification, he said that land degradation and food insecurity were first of all problems of poverty, which was frequently a result of a lack of power and control over resources. The Convention's participatory approach was therefore vital. Norway recognized that the poorest and most seriously affected countries, particularly in Africa, would continue to need international assistance in order effectively to combat desertification: more than 50 per cent of Norway's bilateral assistance and a substantial part of its multilateral assistance was already allocated to sub-Saharan Africa.

29. The fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity had made good progress in advancing implementation of the provisions with regard to sector-specific work programmes and cross-cutting issues. Norway attached great importance to a successful conclusion of the negotiations on a protocol on biosafety.

30. Much remained to be done to implement the ambitious Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States; insufficient resources, as well as the El Niño phenomenon, had contributed to making its full implementation more difficult. Norway intended to co-sponsor the draft resolution on the El Niño phenomenon.

31. **Mr. Boucher** (Barbados), speaking on behalf of the 32 States of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), said that with the adoption of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the international community had affirmed its determination to protect the global climate. There was strong scientific evidence that such interference was already at high and even dangerous levels. The Alliance had

repeatedly stressed the dangers its members faced as a consequence of climate change, the most immediate being sea level rise, which had already resulted in shore erosion and saline infiltration of freshwater sources in almost every region. In addition, devastating hurricanes had rampaged through the Caribbean, wiping out in a matter of hours economic development which had taken some countries years to achieve.

32. The Alliance had expected that the developed countries in particular would move ahead quickly with the necessary domestic actions or "no regrets" measures recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Steps to improve efficiency in the use of fossil fuels and develop alternative sources of energy would constitute a good beginning. However, there was resistance even to such a modest approach to reducing waste of natural resources. He viewed with concern the entrenched behaviours in certain quarters which continued to cling to short-term gains and worked to undermine the Convention to the detriment of all.

33. The Kyoto Protocol was an important first step in forging alliances to foster international consensus on needed actions. However, the emission reduction targets it set were completely inadequate; the developed countries could and must do more. At the forthcoming Conference of the Parties, efforts must be made to ensure that the Kyoto Protocol was not watered down. Stepping up the pace of implementation of the Protocol was a matter of priority.

34. As preparations for the special session of the General Assembly to review the Barbados Programme of Action were under way, Alliance members were particularly worried by the current assessment that overall trends with respect to sustainable development were worse than they had been in 1992. It sometimes appeared that the spirit of Rio had virtually disappeared. Since the Rio Conference, the rapid pace of globalization and liberalization had further underscored the vulnerability of small island developing States. The seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development would serve as the preparatory committee for the special session and would conduct a comprehensive review of the Barbados Programme of Action. Its focus on ecotourism and oceans would underline two critical pillars for economic development of small island developing States.

35. Alliance members felt that their concern with the challenge posed by vulnerability for their sustainable development was better understood than previously and they welcomed the growing interest in the work on an applicable vulnerability index as an important tool in the analysis of national policies. Members of the Alliance believed in the continued relevance of the Barbados Programme of Action; the forthcoming special session could provide the necessary impetus and support to revitalize that programme and ensure that their goal of sustainable development would become a reality.

36. **Ms. Wensley** (Australia) said that the international community continued to make important advances in creating institutional mechanisms to deal with major challenges facing the global environment. Its work was made all the more significant through the great progress many countries themselves had achieved in working towards sustainable development on a national and regional basis.

37. Referring to some of the forthcoming key international environment meetings, she said that the fourth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change represented an important opportunity to advance the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol. The flexibility mechanisms provided for were a vital means of ensuring that emissions commitments were implemented at the least possible cost. Devising mechanisms that provided for the most cost-effective outcomes would be critical to the Protocol's success. Another issue central to longer term goals was an effective global response to climate change. Commitments by developed countries would not be sufficient to achieve the ultimate objective of the Convention. It was not a question of evading or avoiding obligations or commitments, it was simply a fact.

38. She paid tribute to the tireless efforts by the Executive Secretary in implementing the Convention to Combat Desertification and looked forward to the positive results of the forthcoming Conference of the Parties in Dakar. The final negotiating session for a biosafety protocol to the Convention on Biological Diversity would deal with the transboundary movement of living genetically modified organisms and their potential effects on biological diversity. It was essential, that the Protocol should deal only with their transboundary movement without attempting to dictate to Parties their domestic management of such organisms. Its procedures must be consistent with multilateral trading rules that had been developed over many years. A workable protocol that assisted Parties to protect their biological diversity while not imposing restrictions on international trade would promote confidence in and shared knowledge of biotechnology and living genetically modified organisms.

39. Australia had continued to support the implementation of the outcomes of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and had been closely involved in efforts to further the Barbados Programme of Action in the South Pacific, including through

support for the continuing development of the Global Ocean Observing System. It welcomed the opportunity to support preparations for the special session.

40. Her delegation welcomed the report of the Task Force on Environment and Human Settlements. The report of the Secretary-General on ways and means of undertaking the review of progress made in implementing conventions related to sustainable development (A/53/477) would require careful reflection on the desirability and means of achieving better linkages between the various conventions dealing with global, but distinct, environmental issues.

41. Finally, the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development would consider many things of particular interest to Australia, including oceans, small island developing States and tourism. One of the challenges it would face would be how to establish linkages between those themes. In conclusion, her delegation fully supported the proposal that the Committee should consider the environment conventions in a single omnibus resolution.

42. **Mr. Kebede** (Ethiopia) said that, despite the commitments undertaken at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and despite energetic institutional reform, progress had been slow and could not keep pace with new challenges. The international community, therefore, needed to develop additional mechanisms to establish coherent links among existing international environmental conventions.

43. Among the issues which had been considered at that Conference had been the need to conserve biological diversity. Scientific opinion was united in its view that humanity was in the process of squandering an incalculably important resource central to food, health and economic activity. His delegation shared that concern, and was surprised to find that decisions regarding intellectual property rights had major implications for food security, agricultural and rural development and conservation of the environment. The Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement, which defined only the protection of inventions, had formalized the trend to confer private or individual and exclusive rights to intellectual property, while the Convention on Biological Diversity recognized the role of local and indigenous communities in the conservation of biological diversity and considered biological resources as collective property.

44. More than two thirds of all plant species originated in developing countries, and at least 35,000 of them had potential medicinal value. Some of the most commercially attractive enterprises in the international market – pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, seeds and biotechnology – were to a large degree based on biological resources from the South. Yet those materials were often not paid for, being simply gathered and taken away by those with the necessary knowledge. It was ironic that the packages of patented and manipulated biological resources were being sold back to the place of origin as private and exclusive property. There was a widely recognized inequality in the transfer of biological resources between the developed North and the developing South. From that perspective, his delegation placed great importance on the need to protect the rights of communities to enjoy the fruits of their labour and to benefit from the use of the biological resources they nurtured and from their communal knowledge. The Organization of African Unity, in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Authority of Ethiopia, had organized a workshop on community rights and access to biological resources, and he hoped that the recommendations of that workshop would be given due attention and would be taken into account during the forthcoming renegotiation process of the TRIPS agreement.

45. Turning to the issue of environmental degradation in Ethiopia, he said that changes in climatic patterns coupled with anthropogenic calamities had made almost 73 per cent of the land in Ethiopia vulnerable to drought and desertification. Accordingly, environmental issues and sustainable development were at the top of its development agenda and it had prepared a national conservation strategy, an environmental policy and a land use and forestry action plan.

46. Finally, the dream of transforming the outcomes of Rio into effective action would not come true unless sufficient resources were mobilized. Without international collaboration and support, success in the area of environmental protection would be impossible.

47. **Mr. Shihab** (Maldives) said that his delegation attached great importance to the forthcoming special session to review the Barbados Programme of Action and he hoped that the next session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which would, in effect, serve as the preparatory committee for the special session, would incorporate the outcome of the forthcoming meeting between the small island developing States and prospective donors into the documentation of the special session. His delegation also attached great importance to the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the opportunity to negotiate on several new mechanisms established under the Kyoto Protocol.

48. With regard to the question of vulnerability, given the immensity of the potential threat to small island developing

States such as the Maldives, his delegation stressed the need for an economic and ecological vulnerability index in order to reflect greater reality and balance in the criteria for the designation of least developed countries. It welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on that subject (A/53/65), which outlined the extensive work already undertaken by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

49. For the Maldives, given the scientific proof of global warming, sea level rise and ozone depletion, the threat of extinction were very real. Those on the front lines would have to take the lead in the debate, as it would be the smallest and weakest that would be hit first, followed by the rest of the world. There would be no winners.

50. **Mr. Malkani** (India) noted that some developed countries were not only depleting natural resources but also exporting their dirty industries and harmful chemicals that were banned in their own countries to the poorer countries. The special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 had recognized that considerable progress had been made at the national level. Many developing countries had set up, at considerable cost to themselves, local versions of Agenda 21. India had elaborated a national conservation strategy and policy statement on environment and development, a national forestry policy and a policy statement on the abatement of pollution. A national action plan for the conservation of biodiversity was currently being debated in Parliament. A broad-based participatory approach, involving all sectors of society and recognizing the crucial role of women, had been taken in developing the national policy on environment. An Environment Authority had been established in order to ensure the transparency of environmental measures and there were plans to create a national mechanism to deal with accidents in connection with the handling of hazardous substances. His delegation was therefore deeply concerned that industrialized countries had not fulfilled their commitments under Agenda 21 and were even attempting to erode the partnership forged at the Rio Conference, particularly the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, by seeking to impose additional obligations on the developing countries.

51. India would participate actively in the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. He wished to reiterate that, at their recent meeting in Durban, the Movement of Non-aligned Countries had appealed to developed countries to take action at the domestic level to implement their commitments under the Kyoto Protocol. Emissions trading for the implementation of those commitments could not commence until agreement had been reached on the principles and modalities of such trading, including the initial allocation of emissions entitlements to all countries on an equitable basis. He also reiterated the urgent need for immediate action to provide developing countries with the necessary financial and technological resources and environmentally sound technology in order to enable them to fulfil their commitments under the Framework Convention.

52. India would also be participating actively in the forthcoming Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. One issue that must be addressed urgently was the development of proprietary patents based on biodiversity and the traditional knowledge of indigenous communities without the prior informed consent of, or any arrangements to share the benefits with, the developing countries that were the repositories of such biodiversity and knowledge. Effective protection must be guaranteed to indigenous biotechnology, developed over the millennia.

53. Turning to the issue of coherence between the various environmental Conventions, he said that many of the proposals contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/477) required detailed examination. The report raised a number of questions, including questions about the interrelationship between the Commission on Sustainable Development and UNEP. In his delegation's view, the distinctive role played by the Commission and the General Assembly in facilitating holistic consideration of environmental issues and mainstreaming socio-economic concerns should not be overlooked.

54. **Mr. Drayton** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that they attached great importance to the full implementation of the Barbados Declaration and Programme of Action and felt that it was regrettable that relatively few of the projects listed in the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/358) had been successfully implemented. In many cases projects were discontinued after the donor-funded phase owing to a lack of capacity-building at the national and regional levels. At the national level, that could be attributed to limited human resources; project-driven development, resulting in an overly sectoral approach; and a lack of cooperation from the private sector. At the regional level the obstacles included the lack of an integrated approach to project and programme planning, which often resulted in the insufficient mobilization and utilization of resources; the absence of effective information-sharing mechanisms; institutional weaknesses; and limited human and financial resources.

55. In response to those deficiencies, the Community had adopted a declaration in 1997, according top priority to human resource development and stressing the importance of regional institutions and mechanisms. The recent Caribbean Ministerial Meeting on the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action had recognized that the establishment of a permanent regional implementation mechanism was crucial to project execution. While recognizing that the small island developing States bore primary responsibility for the implementation of the Programme of Action, a favourable international economic environment and the continued support of development partners were vital. In that connection, she noted that, at the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, the international community had reaffirmed its commitment to the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and acknowledged that national and regional efforts must be supplemented by external assistance, particularly in the areas of infrastructure, capacity-building and the transfer of environmentally sound technology. The Community therefore attached great importance to the forthcoming donors' conference to be held in February 1999 for which it was compiling project portfolios.

56. The Community welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the development of a vulnerability index for small island developing States (A/53/65) and noted, in particular, the findings of the ad hoc expert group. It was pleased that the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Commonwealth Secretariat had agreed to work together to support a task force for the study of the special circumstances confronting very small economies with a view to formulating a universally acceptable vulnerability index and hoped that the upcoming special session of the General Assembly would witness further progress to that end.

57. The Community was working, both on its own and with its development partners, to provide input to the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in preparation for that special session. It hoped that the Commission's deliberations on a number of issues of particular relevance to small island developing States, including oceans and seas, sustainable tourism and consumption and production and consumption patterns, would lead to specific outcomes.

58. **Mr. Hili** (Malta) called for a stronger political commitment by all countries and greater cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system to halt the degradation of the world's natural resource base. As a small island State, Malta attached great importance to the Agenda for Development, which highlighted the particular circumstances of small island developing States and the need for international support for their development. His delegation looked forward to the work of the special session of the General Assembly to review the Barbados Programme of Action. It was continuing its own work on the formulation of the vulnerability index for small island developing States, which it considered vital. In the meantime, the transfer of technology and human resource development were issues of pressing concern to such States.

59. Noting that his delegation had first proposed consideration of the issue of climate change by the United Nations, he urged the international community to accelerate the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol with a view to taking an integrated approach to the stabilization of greenhouse gas levels. Noting that Malta had been among the first signatories of the Kyoto Protocol he invited all States that had not yet done so to accede to it. Of course the Clean Development Mechanism developed under the Kyoto Protocol would not be sufficient to reverse the harmful effects of climate change; the main polluters must take action to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. His delegation hoped that the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties would bring significant progress to that end.

60. His delegation attached particular importance to the Mediterranean Action Plan coordinated by UNEP. Malta was host to the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea and a member of the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development, whose main purpose was to implement the principles of Agenda 21 in the Mediterranean region. It would also shortly be hosting a meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution, adopted in Barcelona, to be held in October 1999, and, within the framework of the priority action programme, was preparing a coastal zone management plan for the Maltese archipelago.

61. Owing to its size and geographical location, Malta was affected by desertification and land degradation. It had recently ratified the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and organized a national awareness seminar on the issue in collaboration with the Convention secretariat. It would also formulate a national action plan and cooperate with other northern Mediterranean countries in that area. His delegation believed that environmental education and information and the participation of the public in decision making were key long-term tools for redressing environmental problems.

62. **Ms. Young-ju Oh** (Republic of Korea) said that being almost entirely dependent on imports for its domestic energy requirements, the Republic of Korea attached the highest

priority to energy conservation and the limitation of greenhouse gas emissions, not only from an environmental perspective but as a part of its long-term strategy for sustainable development and energy security.

63. Her delegation welcomed the decisions taken at the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity and noted that since development of that treaty regime involved such areas as trade and tourism, it would be necessary to consider practical and substantial cooperation with the relevant international organizations. While her delegation supported the adoption of a biosafety protocol at the earliest possible date, it was concerned at the lack of consensus on several substantive issues, and hoped that States parties would make every effort to expedite the negotiation process.

64. Her delegation attached great importance to the close and cooperative relationship between the Convention to Combat Desertification and the other environmental conventions. Early ratification of the Convention by major signatories would be crucial in securing the financial resources needed for its successful implementation. The Republic of Korea was making every effort to speed its own ratification process. Finally, her delegation looked forward to the forthcoming special session to review the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

65. **Mr. Saenz Biolley** (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Central American countries – Belize, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Costa Rica – said that Central America contained more than 8 per cent of the world's biological diversity, including 33 ecoregions and 20,000 plant species. Panama alone had 925 species of birds and Guatemala, more than 250 species of mammals. With a territory of 511,000 square kilometres and a population of nearly 33 million, Central America was attempting to balance its economic development and the protection of its biological resources. In addition to integrating the Convention on Biological Diversity into their national legislation, the Central American Governments had signed the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development, with a view to preserving biodiversity through, *inter alia*, the development of ecological zones and protected areas, and had established the Central American Commission on Environment and Development and the Central American Council on Protected Areas. Each country had established a National Commission on Biological Diversity in order to develop strategies and carry out country studies on biodiversity. In addition, the Central American countries and Mexico had established a Central American biodiversity information system.

66. The number of protected areas in Central America had soared from 25 to 415 in just three decades; half of them had been designated within the past 12 years. By far the most important initiative to preserve biodiversity had been the establishment of the Programme for the Central American Biological Corridor by the seven Central American countries and Mexico in 1997. The corridor was a series of interconnected protected natural areas in which ecologically friendly production and soil use, investment in conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources were promoted. The corridor was being developed at the local, national and regional levels, largely with financing from the Global Environment Facility, and had gained international recognition. Examples of contributions to the corridor included the commitment by Honduras to maintain 10 protected areas along the Atlantic Coast; a Nicaraguan plan to protect biodiversity and to enable its indigenous population to use certain resources in a sustainable manner; an initiative by Belize and Mexico to safeguard the largest coral reef in the western hemisphere; a Guatemalan initiative to preserve its indigenous cultures' knowledge of biodiversity and its archaeological heritage; the consolidation and modernization of biodiversity research facilities in Costa Rica and its adoption of framework legislation on biodiversity; and the conservation of the flora and fauna resources of Darién in Panama.

67. The Central American countries had adopted economic measures to stimulate conservation and the sustainable use of biological resources. However, their efforts must be complemented by new as well as traditional forms of financing on the part of the international community. The biologically poorer countries of the North, in particular, must assume their responsibility towards the preservation of biodiversity in the biologically richer countries of the South.

68. **Mr. Arbel** (Israel) said that Israel had not fully understood the long-term effects of cultivating arid and semi-arid land and it provided an interesting case study of the synergies between the loss of biodiversity, desertification, deforestation and climate change. In Israel, the conversation of rangeland into irrigated croplands had resulted in desertification, which, in turn had led to a loss of plant and animal species and, subsequently, of topsoil and the potential for rehabilitating biodiversity. Such biodiversity losses had further aggravated desertification.

69. The current prediction was that there would be a reduction in soil moisture and aquifer recharge as a result of increased water evaporation. The loss of biodiversity and green areas had aggravated climate change and initiated a vicious cycle of desertification, global warming and further loss of biodiversity. However, unlike the climate system,

which could be restored by reducing emissions, or desertified land, which could be reclaimed by rehabilitation, once a plant or animal species was lost it was lost forever. Thus, the predicted warming of Israel could well result in the loss of drought-sensitive species and impair its ecosystem.

70. In Israel, the semi-arid region was the richest in flora and fauna. Semi-arid regions were most prone to desertification but, at the same time, their biodiversity could be crucial to rectifying the effects of climate change. Therefore, the natural habitats of semi-arid belts should be protected from both desertification and uncontrolled agricultural development. In the 1950s, Israel's first rime Minister had claimed: "If we don't conquer the desert, the desert will conquer us". Israel had learned that the cost of conquering the desert was the loss of biodiversity.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.